

REFLECTIONS

Leave not
seen by Lowe 1/1-

Upon READING the
TRAGEDY of *HECUBA*,

RECEIVED
LIBRARY

Now in REHEARSAL at the
THEATRE-ROYAL in DRURY-LANE.

*Ut Matrona Meretrici dispar erit, atque
Discolor ; ---* HOR.



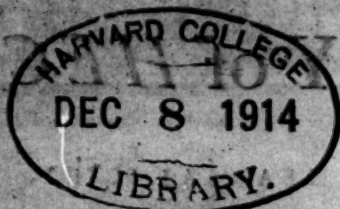
L O N D O N :

Printed by W. WILKINS, at the *Dolphin* in
Little Britain ; and sold by N. BLANDFORD,
at the *London Gazette*, Charing-Cross.

[1726]

REFLECTIONS

Upon Reading



*Gift of
John Craig*

By Matthew Stewart
H. R.



HARVARD
UNIVERSITY
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REFLECTIONS

Upon READING the

TRAGEDY of *HECUBA*.

I CANNOT give the Town a better Account of the Tragedy of *HECUBA*, now in Rehearſal, than by publiſhing the Sentiments upon that Subject, of a Gentleman, whom I ſhall chuſe to call *EUGENIO*.

EUGENIO has an exquisite Taſte of Poetry, and of all thoſe Parts of Learning which dignify
and

and refine our Nature. He is transported with these Studies to a degree, that gives him a kind of Enthusiastick Zeal for the Advancement of Politeness and Literature. This Passion, indeed, lays him sometimes open to the Raillery of those, who want only to see a Man serious, in order to be witty at his Expence. Warmth for what we believe to be right, is peculiar to honest Minds. In the Opinion of EUGENIO, the Wealth and Power of a Country may depend upon the Politeness of it. He will give you a History of several Treaties, in which Advantages were gained or lost, according to the Taste of the Ambassadour, or of the Minister by whose Direction the Ambassadour acted, for *Horace* and *Livy*; tho' the Treaty itself related, perhaps, to the Encouragement of our Woollen Manufacture: for, says he, an Acquaintance with such Authors, prepares and opens the Mind, upon every Occasion, to receive Truth; and at the same time strengthens and fortifies it, against Imposition and Error. I have known the Sight of a new Poem, which discovered a *Genius*, ad-
minister

minister to EUGENIO greater Delight, than *Monycraft* could possibly feel by his Gains upon the late Fall of the Stocks. Humanity, Candour and Indulgence, are the Qualities EUGENIO values himself upon. Parts, unless they are the Attendants of Probity and Good-nature, become dangerous and terrible, and ought to lose our Esteem.

It was with great readiness that I accompanied this Gentleman to the Rehearsal of the Tragedy of HECUBA; being desirous to hear his Observations upon that Performance. As we went together to the Play-house, says EUGENIO: Whether this Play be a Translation, or an Imitation, of *Euripides*, I know not. From the Addition which is said to be made to the Original, I suppose it not to be a close Translation: But, in either case, the Opinion of the World cannot be very advantageous to the Writer. The greatest part of our *English* Translations are such wretched Performances, that those who are ignorant of the Originals, immediately

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conceive,

conceive, by looking into these Copies, a Contempt and Dislike for the Noblest and most Amiable Writers of Antiquity. Scarce any two Books are more unlike, than a true modern Translation to its Original. I am surpris'd it has not been mentioned in behalf of the Tragedy we are going to see, that *Hamlet* is taken from the same Author. Would it not do Honour to *Euripides*, and raise our Opinion of whatever comes from him, were it known to every Body, what is most certainly true, that the Story of *Hamlet* Prince of *Denmark* is owing to the *Orestes* of *Euripides*?

WE were now at the House ; and found the Rehearsal just beginning. We sat with Attention till it was ended ; not without a particular Admiration of the Skill and Justness with which *Mrs. Porter* enters into the Distress of *He-cuba*. Having obtained a Copy of the Play for an Hour or two, we went to a House hard by, and read over again what we had just heard at the Play-House. When we had gone thro' it,

EUGENIO

EUGENIO began: There is such a natural Ease and Freedom in the Language of this Play, that one might easily mistake it for an Original, did not the Justness, the Beauty, and the Propriety of the Sentiments, lead one to a further Enquiry. How perspicuous is the Story? How moving? How pure the Moral? The Generality of our *English* Writers have crowded their Tragedies with such a number of Characters and Incidents, as, instead of Variety, have fill'd the Stage with the utmost Confusion. How many Plays might one name that, for this reason, are wholly unintelligible? Nor is their Language more comprehensible, than the Circumstances of their Stories. These Authors seem to have followed the Advice of the famous *Spanish* Writer, who directs his Politician, in order to be admired, to be very careful not to be understood. What would *Homer*, *Demosthenes*, *Milton*, or *Fenelon*, think of the Rants which have been the Support of most of our Tragedies; or to see fifty Incidents in a Play, and not one of them founded on Reason, or conducted by common Sense? On the contrary,

trary, how vehemently would they join in the Applauses we give to *Shakespear*, and excuse his Errors for the sake of Excellencies perhaps above their own? From the Number of Tragedies written in the manner I was speaking of, which now never appear upon the Stage, tho' formerly acted with the greatest Applause; One may judge how far these Extravagancies would be from winning upon an Audience at present. People either lay Reason quite aside, and without its Incumbrance depend merely upon the Eye and the Ear for their Pleasure, or demand to be more reasonably entertained. According to the Opinion and Example of the best Criticks, who were themselves the best Writers, the supreme Perfection of Style is, where no Pomp of Style appears. Nature should dictate; Passion speak. Of the Morality of our Plays, I shall say nothing. I wish it could be thought that their Defect in this Particular, had prevented their Success: However, I cannot but observe with Pleasure, that our best received Tragedies are those, which are no less worthy our Admiration in

in this, than in every other respect. As to the Play before us : What can be more pathetick and natural than the Speech of HECUBA, when she hears the Decree of the *Grecians* against the Life of her Daughter ? How destitute she appears ? How utterly deprived of all humane Assistance and Comfort ?

-----What can I say ?

*What Words ? what Voice ? what Mourning
shall I use ?*

Unhappy ! doubly so by Age and Servitude !

Captivity and Age ! both hardly borne !

Alas ! alas ! who will defend my Cause ?

What Nation, or what City ? Good old Priam,

Alas ! is dead ! Our Children too are perished !

Where ? whither shall I go ? oh ! where find Rest ?

WHAT *Talthybius* says, when he finds *Hecuba* prostrate on the Ground, and overwhelmed with Sorrow, is highly agreeable to his Character and her Condition.

*Oh! supreme Jove! Father of Gods and Men!
 Art thou unmindful of the Humane Race?
 Or dost thou punish thus their weak Ambition,
 When vainly they believe their State divine?
 Or leave the Guidance of their Fate to Fortune?
 Was not this Form, this most distressful Form,
 Once Queen of wealthy Phrygia? powerful! happy!
 The Wife of Priam, and great Hector's Mother!
 Her City now razed by the Victor's Sword,
 Behold her hopeless! lost! a Prey to Sorrows!
 Oh! may my Age find a propitious Death,
 E'er any Ill like this attacks my Soul!*

THE Satisfaction that *Hecuba* expresses, in
 the midst of her Calamity, upon receiving an
 Account of her Daughter's Behaviour when she
 suffer'd Death, is a fine Picture of that Great-
 ness of Soul which renders Nobility truly
 Noble.

*Oh! my Polyxena, thy Heroick Death
 Was like a Virgin, and a Princess, bred
 In Virtue's School, the School of Worth and
 Honour. The*

(II)

*The gen'rous Soil produces gen'rous Fruit,
And Virtue springs from Virtue : Grievs may
press,
And sore Calamities afflict the Best ;
Yet will they rise, superior to the Strokes
Of adverse Fate, and flourish in Adversity.*

EUGENIO was going on to remark upon other Parts of the Play, particularly that of *Polymnestor*, which is to be acted by Mr. Booth, when we heard the Clock strike Three. He then shut the Book, and holding the Play in his Hand, rose up: This Play, says he, is, in my Opinion, as much beyond the common Run of Tragedies, as a good Copy of a *Grecian* Statue excels, in Beauty, the Image of the late *English* Admiral in *Westminster-Abbey*. To condemn it for any Singularities that appear to me in it, would be like finding Fault with such a Statue, because its Head is not cover'd with a great Perriwig, and its Body with a Coat of the *French* Cut. EUGENIO sent the Play back to the House. We parted.

parted. He went to dine with a Friend near *St. James's*. I returned Home; ruminating upon the anxious Condition of the Writer, whoever he be, who has ventured a Play on the Stage without the usual Aids and Prepossession in its Behalf, and depends merely on the Merit of the Performance for his Success.